

# MISSION VALLEY

Montana Partners for Fish & Wildlife



## Introduction and General Description

The Mission Valley, a glacially carved remnant of 12,000 years past, is located in Lake County of western Montana. The 350,000-acre valley is also within the exterior boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The northern end of the valley is bordered by Flathead Lake with the main stem of the Flathead River to the west. The National Bison Range National Wildlife Refuge forms the southern boundary, and the majestic Mission Mountains tower above the valley's eastern edge. Ownership is a checker-board of private land, Tribal trust parcels, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Management Areas, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Waterfowl Production Areas, and National Wildlife Refuges.

## Species of Special Concern

Habitat types are diverse and varied with a mosaic of forests, glacial fed streams and rivers, spring creeks, riparian areas, glacial potholes, and small remnants of native Palouse prairie. This natural diversity, along with irrigated pastures and small crop fields, makes the Mission Valley an oasis for a unique array of fish and wildlife. Not only does the valley support some of the highest densities of ground nesting migratory birds in the lower 48 states, it is also home to a number of threatened and endangered species. These include bull trout, peregrine falcon, gray wolf, and bald eagles. Grizzly bears are also becoming regular visitors to the valley floor. Grizzlies have always inhabited the surrounding mountain ranges but were rarely seen in the lowlands.



Today, it is commonplace for bears to venture into the valley. Some theories for this behavior include:

1. plentiful vole populations (a seasonal food source)
2. poor berry production in the mountains
3. changing social structure within the bear populations
4. movement by juveniles into new territories

For whatever reason, the Mission Valley has become important grizzly bear habitat.



## Threats

Habitat fragmentation and habitat degradation are the two biggest threats to the Mission Valley. Spring creeks and streams have been overgrazed, channelized, diverted, and dewatered. Wetlands have been drained and filled. Upland areas are often overgrazed, and invasive species are expanding rapidly. But these problems pale in comparison to the habitat fragmentation caused by subdivision. Like many western Montana valleys, the Mission Valley's landscape is being carved into 20- and 40-acre subdivisions. Unfortunately, subdivision is permanent and irreversible.

## Conservation Strategies

The Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program began working in the Mission Valley in 1990. To a great extent, past Partners' efforts have focused on wetland restoration. Over time, our restoration emphasis expanded to all habitat types including streams and riparian corridors. The stream restoration are providing critical habitat for native and wild salmonids. Restoring and enhancing riparian corridors improves habitat connectivity for bears and migratory birds. Working cooperatively with private landowners to restore habitat will continue to be a key component of our conservation efforts in the Mission Valley. Reducing or preventing subdivision is another goal in the valley. Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife is working with Refuge and Realty staffs to identify potential easement tracts. Tracts immediately adjacent to Wetland Protection Areas or National Wildlife Refuges receive top priority.

We are also working with key partners to take advantage of new opportunities in the valley. The Jocko River restoration project is one such opportunity. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe recently received a large mitigation settlement for clean-up on the Clarke Fork Watershed. The Jocko River has been identified as a critical tributary because of its native fish values. Over the next 3 years, we will be working cooperatively with the Tribe to restore the Jocko River.



7-acre wetland establishment along the Mission Mountains.



Prairie pothole complex under perpetual protection.



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## Partners

One or more of the various partners listed below has played an integral role in each and every project that has been completed thus far.

Private Landowners  
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Pheasants Forever  
Ducks Unlimited  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Trout Unlimited  
Montana Trout Foundation  
Montana Lane Reliance  
Lake County Conservation District  
Lake County Weed district  
Lower Flathead Valley Community Foundation  
Flathead Resource Organization  
Salish and Kootenai College  
University of Montana  
Charlo Schools  
Montana Department of Transportation  
Flathead Irrigation Project

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## Accomplishments

Since its inception in 1990, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, along with a variety of diverse partners, has been successful in completing numerous habitat restoration projects.

Wetland Restoration	370 Sites	910 Acres
Stream Restoration	34 Sites	52 Miles
Upland Enhancement	19 Sites	1,450 Acres
Conservation Easements	20 Sites	7,000 Acres

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## Future Needs

In order to be effective with landscape management in the Centennial Valley for years to come, increases in staff time and funding from both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy are crucial. There are no shortages of opportunities to restore important fish and wildlife habitat, increase land stewardship activities, secure conservation easements, and restore connectivity for a whole host of fish and wildlife species in the Centennial Valley.



Instream restoration on Ronan Spring Creek.

# Mission Valley (600,000 acres)

